
BASIL KEITH'S REVENGE.

BY LILA M. LAIRD.

CHAPTER I.

"Is mother very sick, Matty?"

"I'm afraid she is, my poor child, but maybe she would be better if 'twas warmer here. This room is cold enough to freeze one's very breath," and Matty Ridge, kneeling upon the broken hearth, tried in vain to fan the feeble fire into something like a blaze.

"There's no use in trying to make these chips burn, they are too wet; but don't look grieved about it, Jane—I'll run over home and get something to make you up a nice fire;" and, brushing the ashes from her apron, the kind-hearted neighbor left the dreary room.

Jane Keith sat down on the floor, and shiveringly pulled her little shawl around her shoulders, but she soon sprang to her feet, for from the low bed in the corner came a voice—

"Jane! Jane! where are you?"

"Here, close by you, mother;" and the child pressed her rosy cheek to the thin, white hand of the sick woman; "but are you worse?—do tell me, do you want anything?"

"No, nothing; only I am chilled from head to foot. Jane, it is very cold here."

"I know it, dear mother. The fire will not burn, but Matty Ridge has gone to get some wood. Perhaps, when she comes back we will be warmer."

Gertrude Keith gave no heed to these words. She closed her eyes, and lay thus so long and so silently that the little girl thought she slept. But Jane was mistaken, for, when she sought to move away, the cold fingers tightened upon hers, and the low, sweet voice murmured—

"Don't leave me, Jane; I want to talk to you. You are cold, child; come close to me;" and, creeping under the miserable covering, Jane Keith clung with a shudder to her mother. "Is there any money in the house, Jane?"

The child shook her head sadly.

"Have we any wood?"

"Only little pieces that the neighbors give us;" and Jane hid her face in the pillow, and cried.

"Poor darling, so young and yet so wretched," said Gertrude Keith, passing her hand gently over her daughter's silken curls. "I could cry, too, not for myself, but for you."

"And I was crying for you, mother;" and the little girl wiped her eyes and tried to smile.

"Well, then, daughter, we will have no tears; and now tell me where is Basil?"

"He went away early this morning. He has gone to look for work."

"Then he got none yesterday?"

"No, mother."

"Poor Basil! poor Jane!" faintly murmured the sick woman. Then again she closed her eyes, but this time Jane knew she was not sleeping. Gertrude Keith was praying, and the cry of her agonized heart was, "Lord, have mercy on my children."

Along the dark passage came a quick, boyish step, then the door opened, and Basil Keith came into the room. Mrs. Keith raised herself upon her elbow, and looked eagerly at her son—

"Can you get any work, Basil?"

"No—no," and, with a sort of sobbing moan, the boy knelt beside the little bed. "I don't mind being so poor for myself, mother, but it makes my heart sick to think I can do nothing for you and Jane."

"As for me," said Gertrude Keith, calmly, "I shall soon be where hunger and cold cannot come. Don't cry, my darlings. I sorrow only for you, dear son, sweet daughter; this will be, indeed, the bitterness of death, to go from you, and leave you so lonely, so miserable."

And little Jane answered her mother only by a passionate burst of tears; but Basil, raising his head, said cheerfully—

"You will not die, mother: you will get well, and then I can get work, and we will all be happy once more."

"Poor dreamer," whispered the sick woman, and then she twined her arms more fondly round

her children, and the three, clinging together, wept bitterly.

That wretched home, with its dreary room, that weeping, shivering mother and her children, made a sad picture. Yet, after all, it was but one of many. Grievous Want was forever painting such, and scattering them through that great city; but Charity slept, and men's hearts were slow to look on these woful pictures.

A bright fire leaped up on the hearth, and Matty Ridge, turning from her work with a glad heart, felt that it was more blessed to give than to receive.

"Don't thank me any more, Mrs. Keith," she said, "it is sure my pleasure to help you. I'll do anything for you I can, and I am grieved enough that I can do so little, for it is cutting me to the heart to see a delicate born lady like you in such a place."

CHAPTER II.

"Basil, I thought of it as I lay awake last night in the cold, white moonlight. It seems to me all that can be done; there is no other way. I know this cup is very bitter. Child, can you take it?"

"Mother, I cannot. Oh! tell me, is there nothing but this?"

And from Gertrude Keith's pale lips sadly came the answer—

"No—nothing."

"I would save your high spirit this, if I could, but we are starving, we are freezing, and aid must be sought. Go but to one person, Basil. If Ryall Marsh refuses you, ask no one else."

Basil Keith looked moodily on the floor. A fierce struggle was going on in his proud heart, and he answered in a stifled voice—

"Mother, it will kill me to beg."

"No—no, boy, it will not; the pang will be sharp, but it will soon be over. Why, Basil, how strangely you talk: hunger and cold you have battled stoutly with, and yet you say it will kill you to beg."

Gertrude Keith said this in a quick, excited way, and Basil turned towards her; then he met her large black eyes fixed imploringly upon him. That look went to his heart, and, burying his face in his hands, the boy wept. At length, Basil grew calm, and, brushing away the tears, he said, slowly and firmly—

"It is over now, mother. I will go."

Yes! the sharp conflict was ended. Poverty had triumphed! Pride was conquered.

"Bless you, Basil, for this. I have long shrunk from this step, but my heart is weak; I cannot endure much. Perhaps, I do wrong in sending you to Ryall Marsh, yet he may help us, and want is stern and bitter."

"I know it, dear mother, and let me go now—now, whilst I am braced for it;" and the boy picked up his cap, but his mother checked him.

"Take Jane with you, she is so little, and so fair, and it may be she can help you the better to plead your story. Perhaps, together, you can move his heart; and, Basil, remember, boy, you do not go to Ryall Marsh as an every-day beggar. You have a right to ask help from that man. His injustice, his oppression, robbed your father

of his possessions, and sent him to an early grave. Ryall Marsh made us what we are, and I send you to him to ask but your own again."

And Basil Keith pinned the scanty shawl carefully around his little sister, and smoothed with loving fingers the brown curls under the old hood. Then he took her by his side, and his hand was on the latch when his mother again called him—

"I have just thought of something, Basil," said she, earnestly: "will you get me a piece of paper and a pencil?"

Basil wondered.

"There is nothing here, mother, but the leaf of an old book."

"That will do. Push the pillows under me while I write. There, 'tis done. Don't look at it, my child. Put it in your pocket, and should Ryall Marsh sternly refuse you, give him this. Don't tell him your names," and, gasping for breath, the sick woman sank back in her bed.

"Take care of mother when we are gone, Matty," whispered Basil, as he passed the kind neighbor in the little entry. "We will come back soon."

Matty promised, and the children hurried into the street. They looked round more than once at their home, and half wondered if they ought not to run back again to tell Matty to take care of their mother.

"And Basil thought *his* struggle was hard. Ah! if he had but known how my heart shrank from sending him to that man. Bitter straits—sharp sufferings—have driven me to it, though. God grant that Ryall Marsh may have mercy on me and my children;" and with tears Gertrude Keith hid her face upon her pillow.

Basil and Jane Keith went hand in hand through the crowded streets, shiveringly clinging to each other, whilst the rich and the gay pushed past the little children, unheeding their wretchedness. The air was biting cold, and from the dull, sad sky overhead came ever and anon a tiny snow-flake. Basil and Jane Keith shuddered when it fell on them. Snow was full of cold misery to *them*.

Ryall Marsh's great brick house, with its gleaming marble steps, loomed out grimly in the distance, and Basil felt his heart sinking as they crossed towards it.

"We are little beggars, now, Jane," whispered he, bitterly, as he lifted the heavy knocker. "We have come to ask this man for money: don't you feel as though you could kill yourself for very shame? I do."

"No, Basil," said the little girl, lifting her large, black eyes to her brother's flushed face, "no I do not; we are only doing as mother told us. Would *she* send us here if there was shame in it?"

"She wouldn't, I am sure. Ah! Jane, you are right; but this thing grieves me to the soul."

CHAPTER III.

"Two children who would see you, sir," and with this the servant threw open the door. And Basil and Jane went into a grand, gloomy looking parlor, richly carpeted, and hung with great mirrors and rare paintings; there they stood silent

and wondering, till a sharp voice from the upper end of the room caused them to start and turn thither. It was Ryall Marsh who spoke, and his words were rough—

"If you want anything of me, out with it, and begone, for I have little time to waste on you."

Then Basil, followed by Jane, went close up to the stern-browed man, who sat in his cushioned chair by the fire, and the two stood before him with downcast eyes, for in their childish hearts they were afraid.

"What have you come for? Why don't you speak?" and these angry questions seemed by their harshness to infuse new strength in Basil, for he raised his head, and said—

"We have come to ask money of you. Sir, we are starving, we are very cold at home; will you not help us?"

Ryall Marsh pushed back his spectacles, and looked keenly at the boy.

"You are a cool young beggar, I see; but be off, I have nothing for you."

But Basil pleaded—"Do not send us away, we are so very poor, so very wretched: give us but a little, and the dear angels will bless you for it."

"It certainly don't matter to me if you are so very poor; I am not bound to support every lazy young beggar who strolls about. Come, you had better be tramping," and the old man's brow wrinkled with an angry frown.

Then out spoke the fiery heart of Basil Keith—"How dare you, sir, call me a lazy young beggar? I am not such; but you are a wicked man—you cheated my father out of all that he had; I have a right to come to you; I am asking but my own again."

Ryall Marsh looked up in fierce amazement. "What does the fool mean? I never knew your father, boy, and for your insolence take this;" and as the excited old man advanced towards Basil, little Jane threw herself upon her knees before him.

"Don't strike Basil, sir," she sobbed; "don't be angry with him, but do please have mercy on us, we are so very poor, and mother is sick, and so cold—do help us."

"Get along, you crying brat!" sternly said Ryall Marsh, and then he roughly pushed Jane from him. The child staggered, and fell on her face. She was not much hurt, but sorely frightened. Her tears flowed faster than ever. And Basil Keith, his slight figure trembling, his pale cheek crimsoning, and his black eye flashing with fierce rage, sprang forward.

"You are cruel, Ryall Marsh," he said, bitterly, "and as cowardly as you are cruel. Old man, how could you strike a little girl to the floor? I despise you, I spurn you; and now, if you offered me your gold, I would dash it in your face. Come, Jane, come darling, we will go away from here," and the boy took his sister lovingly by the hand. But ere the two reached the door, Basil again spoke—"I hope God may forgive you, old Ryall Marsh, for this hour's bitter work, but I cannot. We are so poor, and we came to you humbly asking alms. And how have you answered us? By harsh words, cruel refusals, and blows. And, mark me, sir, I will have revenge for this, yes, full revenge, even were it thirty years hence;"

and ceasing to speak, Basil Keith passed out with a firm proud step, from Ryall Marsh's presence. And home went the children, even as they came, sorrowing and friendless; but, in Basil's heart was kindled an angry fire, and on his lips trembled a bitter word—*revenge! revenge!*

"Mother, I have told you all. Ryall Marsh had no mercy on us, and I dashed the paper on the floor, and left him; I left him sitting amongst his fair and goodly things whilst we passed out miserable. Mother, I will have revenge on that old man; I told him so, and I mean to keep that vow," and Basil's face flushed with passion.

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord," slowly and solemnly said Gertrude Keith: "son, remember what the Book says, 'Bless them which curse you, pray for those who despitefully use you.' Ryall Marsh has dealt harshly with my children, he has done me other wrongs you dream not of; yet, God helping me, I forgive him. Basil, do even this—forgive, as you hope to be forgiven." And this was the mother's last counsel to her boy, for, as the night deepened, Gertrude Keith grew faint and weak, and her voice became low and gasping, so that the neighbors who stood about her knew that the angel of death had called her. "The swellings of Jordan" were not terrible to the dying woman: a sure Comforter was crossing with her, and upon Him she leaned rejoicingly.

When the morning came, it found a white-robed earth, pure with glistening snow, but as for Gertrude Keith she had put on a whiter raiment, one goodly and fair, even the spotless robe of a "blessed immortality."

CHAPTER IV.

"At your peril let those insolent young beggars darken my doors again." And after this rough command, Ryall Marsh dismissed his servant, and sat moodily down by the fire. A tiny piece of paper lay on the carpet, and the old man, hardly recking what he did, stooped and picked it up. Then he read with misty eyes, and a strange sudden sinking at his heart, these three words—"Remember little Getty." This was the paper the beggar boy had dashed down so proudly, and this was its pleading message—"Remember little Getty." And memory took Ryall Marsh back to earlier years, when he first sat a lonely man in his grand house. She brought to his side a fairy child with long raven curls and great black eyes, who looked up lovingly in his face, and murmured, when he caressed her—"dear uncle."

That was "little Getty," his orphan niece, his adopted daughter, and the old man groaned as the vision faded away. And memory drew another picture, and Ryall Marsh's heart smote him as he looked upon it. Kneeling before him, in the moonlight, was a white-robed figure with clasped hands and pleading words, but he seemed to repulse her angrily, and when she clung to him he struck her to the ground. Then a tall, slender man, with high, haughty brow, darted forward, and raising the weeping girl to his bosom, soothed her, saying—"We will go from here, Gertrude, cease to plead with your uncle—am I not your husband; better to you than all the world?"

And when this scene faded, old Ryall Marsh knew that he had looked upon his niece, and her husband, Pierre Keith, even as they had sought his forgiveness after their marriage. Then Ryall Marsh sat in his counting-house, and papers lay before him, and as he looked on them he rejoiced, for he saw that but a stroke of his pen would make Pierre Keith a beggar. As he hesitated, the tempter stood by him, and whispered—"Why show mercy on the man who stole away the blossom of your heart, your little Getty? Revenge yourself on him, and punish her disobedience." And Ryall Marsh yielded, and the deed was done. Now came back the days of tearful entreaties, and beseeching letters, all of which the old man cast from him with scornful mockery and a hardened heart: then silence followed, profound, prolonged—"little Getty" had ceased to plead.

"And those little beggars were her children, that was the reason their black eyes thrilled me, so like hers—yet I drove them from me. Oh, 'Getty,' if I had but known."

But Ryall Marsh's heart, as though amazed at this unwonted mood, fell suddenly and heavily back into its iron case, the child's play was over—the old man was himself again, stern and unrelenting; and, with a grim smile, he cast the paper into the fire.

"Remember little Getty." Well, had she not been remembered with bitter faithfulness for at least a weary hour, and was not that enough?

Like a skilful artificer, who noiselessly doeth his work, Time hurried on, and wrought marvellous changes. Basil and Jane Keith went out into the great world, and, for a while, struggled sorely; but their path was not *always* to lie over the bleak and rugged moor, or by the bitter waters, and, in due season, came a change. Pierre Keith's oldest brother, wealthy and childless, (by what some would call a lucky chance, yet, what was God's gracious providence,) discovered these children, and adopted them as his own. Then to Basil and Jane, poverty ceased to be the stern, living reality which had for so many years walked closely by their sides; it became only the misty memory of a dark dream. And to others came changes. Ryall Marsh fell suddenly from his high estate. Gold took wings, and fled from him, and his name vanished from amongst the rich and the strong of the city. And, as Ryall Marsh's wealth had been great, so now was his poverty. The old man became a beggar.

He who does not see the dread seal of *mutability* upon all things earthly, has looked upon life with but dim and mistaken eyes. Oh, walk ye warily amongst the high places, and "let him that standeth take heed lest he fall."

CHAPTER V.

Across the Heavens were sailing great black clouds, through which the stars looked out faintly, and up and down the earth went moaning a keen searching wind. It was a bleak November night, full of cold and gloom.

Upon the broad steps of a great hotel, crouched an old and wretched-looking man; he was sick and faint, but the din of the city drowned his

moans, and the crowd hurried by unheeding his misery. At last, before the hotel, there stopped a travelling carriage, and from it alighted two persons—Basil Keith and his sister. They came up the steps with light laughter and merry words, and as the old sick beggar raised his head and saw their costly furs and warm wrappings, he drew his miserable rags closer round him with a shudder. He was so very cold.

After a time the hall door opened, and Basil Keith stood again upon the steps; as he turned to descend them, his quick eye fell upon the crouching figure, which, half-hidden in the shadow, seemed as though it were trying to shrink away into the very bricks and mortar. Basil bent over the old man and spoke kindly to him; but he was too chilled and weak to give any answer.

"Who is this wretched creature?" Basil asked of a servant.

"That, sir," said the waiter, "is one of the most troublesome beggars as is in this city. It's old Ryall Marsh; he comes here about fifty times a day, and according to what *he* says, he is always either freezing or starving."

"Bring him in," said Basil so earnestly, that the servant started; "bring him in, place this old man in one of your best rooms; take care of him. Tell your master the responsibility of this matter shall rest upon myself. Why do you linger? I have money. You will not lose by it."

But the servant shrank back from touching the miserable beggar, and Basil Keith himself raised the old man from the steps, and supported him into the hall.

"He is benumbed and bewildered with cold," said Basil, as he looked pityingly in Ryall Marsh's pallid face; "here, take him to a warm room, place him in bed, care well for him; I will pay you."

"Jane, do you remember Ryall Marsh?"

Jane Keith shuddered, then she looked up from her luxurious chair wondering at her brother. But she did not see his face. Basil was leaning against the mantel-piece, steadily gazing into the fire.

"Yes, I remember him," she answered, mournfully; "but, oh! Basil, why did you ask me *that* question? It has awakened such a host of bitter memories."

Basil Keith crossed the room, and sat down beside his sister.

"Jane," he said gravely, "if Ryall Marsh should by some strange Providence come before us, not as the proud rich man, but as a miserable, destitute beggar, seeking our alms, what ought we to do? What would you do? Remember the past, and tell me."

"Basil, with the memory of the past brightly before me, I answer you. I forgave Ryall Marsh long ago. Now, were he to seek aid from me, he should have it. I would pity him. I would help him gladly—freely."

"And yet, Jane, he struck you."

"Brother, have you forgotten it is written, 'return good for evil?'" and Jane Keith looked up with a beaming, tearful smile, in Basil's face.

"No, dear and noble-hearted sister, I have not. I have talked thus but to try you. Ryall Marsh

is indeed a wretched beggar. I found him sick and cold upon the hotel steps, and but one hour ago, I had him brought into this house. Jane, we will befriend this old man, and let us completely forget the past, and remember only that he was our mother's uncle."

And *this* was Basil Keith, the Basil who long years before had vowed from his boyish heart fierce revenge upon Ryall Marsh. That fiery heart was changed and purified, its bitter enmity was put away, and Basil Keith, now a humble follower of "Him, who when He was reviled, reviled not again"—could truly say to Ryall Marsh, "I forgive thee."

CHAPTER VI.

Worn out with want and suffering, the old man sickened. A terrible scorching fever burned ever in his brain, so that he knew not, nor could he clearly see the faces of his tender and constant watchers—Basil and Jane Keith.

And one night when Basil slept heavily, for he was wearied by continual watching, Jane came to his side and awoke him. "Get up, dear Basil," she said, "and come with me to Ryall Marsh's room; the fever has left him, and he is calm and quiet now. When I handed him some water, he looked up in my face with a pleasant smile, and called me 'little Getty'—perhaps he thinks I am mother; but come and see him, a change has come over the old man."

And when the brother and sister went again to Ryall Marsh's bedside, he looked steadfastly in their faces, and asked, "Are not you Basil and Jane, the children of Pierre and Gertrude Keith?"

Jane started at this question, but her brother calmly answered, "We are."

"And tell me," went on the old man with a kind of nervous earnestness, "do you know how harshly I drove your mother from my house after her marriage; how cruelly I worked her husband's ruin?"

Again he paused for an answer, and again Basil bowed his head and answered, "We do."

"Yet another question," said Ryall Marsh, "are you the children who came to my house that winter-day asking help, and whom I sent from me with such bitter, angry refusals?"

Then answered both brother and sister, "We are indeed the same, but we have forgiven all that long since."

"What manner of creatures are you?" asked Ryall Marsh, half mockingly; "surely not like every-day flesh and blood, that you can thus forgive and befriend the man who has shown nothing but harsh enmity to you. How can you do this?"

"Not of ourselves, indeed, sir," replied Jane Keith, "have we done this, but by the gracious help of the Almighty Forgiver. From His word we have learned to bless those who curse us, and pray for those who spitefully use us."

"Those are sweet words, Jane Keith, and you said them in a loving voice, like my 'little Getty's.' Your eyes and hair are like her's, too, so beautiful and black; kneel down beside me, and tell me again that you forgive me."

And this the lady did, earnestly and tearfully.

"You told me years ago, Basil Keith, that you

would have revenge on me. Now that hour has come, and your revenge is complete; it stings me to the heart; it verily is as 'coals of fire upon my head.'" And the old man groaned.

"Be comforted, sir," said Basil, kindly; "think no more of these things; they are long since past and forgiven, most truly by Jane and myself. As for my boyish threat of revenge, forgive that. My mother chided me for it, and on her death bed she bade me forgive you even as she had done."

A smile came over Ryall Marsh's wrinkled face. "Forgiven by 'little Getty' and her children; that is sweet—and now, oh! God, will Thou not too forgive me, a wretched, dying sinner?"

When morning light came, it found Ryall Marsh cold and rigid upon his bed. The stern old man was dead; his dark life was ended, and he had closed his eyes, tenderly watched and soothed by those whom he had most injured.

Basil Keith had a fair monument placed over Ryall Marsh's remains, and this people yet look upon with wonder. They know that old Ryall Marsh, the beggar, rests beneath, but they do not know *why* the rich stranger and his beautiful sister nursed him with such tender care, and at last placed his body in so lovely a resting-place. And *this* was Basil Keith's revenge, threatened so fiercely in his boyhood, executed so gloriously in his manhood. Surely it was not of *this* world, for earth's children would scorn *such* a revenge.